Family Affairs: Complicity, Betrayal, and the Family in Hisham Matar’s *In the Country of Men* and Nadine Gordimer’s *My Son’s Story*

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**Abstract**

This essay undertakes a comparative reading of the dynamics of complicity and resistance in two contemporary Anglophone novels, Nadine Gordimer’s *My Son’s Story* (1990) and Hisham Matar’s *In the Country of Men* (2006). My analysis pursues three main lines of inquiry: the ostensible public/private and political/personal divides; loyalty and betrayal in the family; and the ambiguous status of the child as a witness and a political subject. I argue that in their respective portrayals of the protagonists’ struggles against South African apartheid and authoritarian rule in Libya, both authors use the device of the child narrator to expose the tension between the family and the political world, pointing to the fallacy of separating the political from the personal. The two novels depict complicity not as a problem of individual morality in a standoff against the state’s abuse of power, but rather as an issue that is deeply embedded in the psychology of family relations. As such, they lead us to evaluate both resistance and complicity through the lens of familial betrayal. Ultimately, Gordimer and Matar use the child narrator’s partial understanding to reconsider the ethics of complicity, yet the two authors diverge in their political conclusions.

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